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Wetlands Viewing Deck Will Open Eyes to Wildlife
Abilene Founders Lions Club Celebrates 100 Year Legacy

ABILENE, TEXAS – The Abilene Founder Lions Club will cut the ribbon Friday to open the club’s centennial legacy project: a new Wetlands Viewing Deck at the Abilene Zoo.

Everyone is invited to see the opening ceremony June 9, at 11 a.m., in the zoo’s Wetlands of Americas area. The deck dedication celebrates the 100th anniversary of both the Abilene Founder Lions Club and Lions Club International, both launched in 1917. It also marks the unveiling of the zoo’s refurbished Wetlands of the Americas, featuring a new home for the zoo’s sand hill cranes and a temporary home for the lesser flamingos.

“Underwriting this structure is the club’s way of saying thank you to the citizens of Abilene for their continued support of Lionism and the Abilene Founder Lions Club, in particular.” said Club President Jeff Eckard. “Lions Club International’s motto is ‘We Serve,’ and as Abilene’s oldest club, our members have a long history of projects reflecting that credo. Where there’s a need, there’s a Lion.”

Indeed, as the club marked this milestone, members decided they wanted to build something for future generations to enjoy, approaching the zoo as they looked for a worthy project.

“The deck was part of the zoo’s long-term plan, and we’re grateful the Lions offered their enthusiastic support,” said Zoo Director Bill Gersonde. “This area is a recommended stop along the state’s ‘Great Wildlife Trails of Texas’ program because it’s a great spot for bird-watching.”

The new shady spot in the zoo’s wetlands section, which features animals native to both South America and the swampy habitats along the North American coast, will give guests a quiet spot to watch both the animals in the zoo and the native wildlife that frequents Nelson Lake. The deck was constructed by zoo staff, who also worked to spiff up the exhibits for the other wetlands species, including a new home for the sand hill cranes and a temporary home for the zoo’s new African lesser flamingos.

Giving people a better view of their world has been a recurring mission among the Abilene Founder Lions Club’s many service projects. The group provides eyeglasses for needy Abilene children and adults and is a longtime supporter of the Leader Dog Training School for the Blind and the Lions District Tissue and Eye Bank. On a broader scale, favorite causes include the Texas Lions Camp for Children with physical disabilities, college scholarships to AISD graduates via the Watkins and Wells Scholarships, and support to the local Lee Elementary School by purchasing classroom supplies and honoring the teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week.

The local club gets bragging rights to use the prestigious title of “Founder” thanks to its leadership role 100 years ago. On June 17, 1917, the Abilene group joined forces with 16 other

independent Lions Clubs from around the country at a momentous meeting in Dallas, Texas. Those 17 clubs ambitiously formed Lions Club International -- now the world's largest service club organization, with 46,000 clubs and 1.35 million members.

About the Abilene Founder Lions Club:

Serving Abilene since 1917, the Abilene Founders Lions Club improves the community through service projects funded by these local efforts: a Community Flag Display Service, the annual Robert Tiffany Miniature Golf Tournament and White Cane Day.

For those interested in learning more about Lionism, the Abilene Founder Lions Club meets every Thursday at noon, at Al's Mesquite Grill on Buffalo Gap Road. Visitors are always welcome. For additional information about the group, follow them on Facebook or e-mail the club secretary at darlaflatt@gmail.com.

About the Abilene Zoo:

Since its founding in 1966, the Abilene Zoo has stood as a place of learning and adventure, where visitors make memories, share the joy of discovery and become inspired to preserve wildlife. Situated on 16 acres in the award-winning Grover Nelson Park, the zoo provides a lushly landscaped walkable setting with more than 1000 animals of 270 species from around the globe. The zoo is open 7 days a week (closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day) from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Last admittance is 4 p.m. Tickets are \$7 for adults, \$4.50 for children ages 3-12, \$6 for seniors aged 60 and older. Members are admitted free. www.abilenezoo.org. 325-676-6085.